

**The Man Behind the Mask:  
Looking at Men's Faces in Films**  
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Recent analyses of masculinity in Hollywood films tend to neglect the specific problems attached to the representation of the male face on the screen. Among others,<sup>1</sup> Susan Jeffords and Yvonne Tasker have looked at men's bodies as displayed on the cinema screen in the last two decades, attesting to the privileged position of the muscled body in the Reaganite 1980s and of the softer body of the feminised caring man in the early 1990s of the Bush era. Still, neither the faces of the men they discuss, nor the monstrosity of the bodies they describe, especially that of the muscled man, receive in their work the attention they deserve.

Given the importance of the body in gender, cultural and film studies, it is hard to explain why the face is habitually neglected as an important generator of meaning. Not even female faces attract much interest. Roland Barthes<sup>2</sup> devoted a memorable essay in *Mythologies* to the face of Greta Garbo, but his text is still today exceptional. As regards men, the scarcity of analysis of the face is even more conspicuous. Jean Baudrillard attributes this disconnection between the representation of the face and the body to the rise of pornography in the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This genre does not require any particular expressivity from the faces of the actors involved in the performance. Sexual nudity, Baudrillard argues, is so spectacular that the face is erased, becoming anonymous. He attributes "the total triumph in pornography of the obscene body, to the point where the face is effaced" to "the distinction between face and body in a culture of meanings" in which the body "becomes monstrously *visible*" as a sign of "a monster called desire."<sup>3</sup>

The repression of homoerotic desire and the silencing of women's heterosexual desire for men until recently may have to do very much with this strange effacement of the male face, at least at the level of cultural analysis. It is quite clear that at the level of consumption, the male face dominates a segment of the film market: that addressed to younger women. They will buy the merchandising tied in with the release of particular films or associated to a particular male star: the posters, the postcards, the photos. The choice of female and indeed male consumers is ultimately what enforces the prevalence of one type of male face –one type of idealised masculinity– over another. Yet the offer is shaped by interests that may differ from those of the consumers, and in the case of Hollywood film, the offer is clearly dominated by men.

Abigail Solomon-Godeau maintains that masculinity regenerates itself through a dialectical relationship between the idealised models of the warrior and the ephebe. What should be researched, therefore, is why at any given point "one model of

masculinity may be privileged over the other, or, alternatively, how the coexistence of both models conforms, or fails to conform to society's official prescriptions (and proscriptions) for its masculine norm."<sup>4</sup> Before the 19<sup>th</sup> century the image of the phallic warrior and the androgynous ephebe would offer an ideal split model, central to the values of men in an aristocratic culture. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century when homophobic bourgeois values replaced aristocratic values the homosocial was made to prevail over the homoerotic. The active, virile warrior type was preserved because it propounded an ideal the beholder could identify with; the androgynous male was forced to the background because it forced the homophobic bourgeoisie man to face homoerotic desire. Feminised ideals and the androgynous man would emerge in moments when fear of women's power leads men to incorporate femininity in ideal manhood so as to erode its impact. This would be the case now. Solomon-Godeau maintains that no real change in power relations occurs through the changing representations of masculinity and warns women that they are by no means empowered by them. Female audiences may be pleased by the new presentation in the 1990s of the male body as an object of desire and by the more androgynous faces of the new idols of beauty, but, as Denski and Sholle note "seduction is used to seduce the female and control her desire."<sup>5</sup> Aiming at either heterosexual or homosexual seduction, men use body and face to validate new images of masculinity spurred by their need to empower marginal masculinities, by the narcissistic pleasures involved in multiplying their image and, above all, by the constant redefinition of the acceptable models of masculinity in a post-patriarchal context.

As Stephen Cohan writes, "the hegemonic masculinity of a historical era does not define a proper male sex role for all men to follow so much as it articulates various social relations of power as an issue of gender normality".<sup>6</sup> The difference between the split ideal Solomon-Godeau describes and today's masculinity is that there is longer has a clear model of normative masculinity. Although Arnold Schwarzenegger might be said to embody the warrior type, while Johnny Depp is closer to the androgynous ephebe, the idea that they represent alternative idealised models does not hold. They are but two possibilities within a very wide range of representations of masculinity in film. Hollywood cinema is today the main cultural locus generating the idealised images of masculinity, together with popular music, fashion and sports, a situation that deserves in itself further research –why aren't, for instance, politicians or writers offering models of idealised masculinity?

The range of male faces Hollywood displays in its films is very wide. The difference with previous periods is that this variety has reached the leading roles. The short list of male Hollywood stars at the top includes some of the men most admired world-wide because of their beauty and talent: Brad Pitt, Tom Cruise, Mel Gibson, Sean Connery. But it also includes men of great talent but much less obvious beauty: Robert de Niro, Dustin Hoffman, Jack Nicholson, Al Pacino. It might be argued that an actor, male or female, needn't be beautiful but talented. Yet the point is that a woman must be talented *and* beautiful to triumph in Hollywood, whereas a man need only be talented. There is no tolerance for plain female faces on the screen. In contrast, the screen makes attractive even those male faces that are, to say the least, outside the canons of beauty.

This variety of male faces discloses men's chameleonic abilities to reshape masculinity as the hegemonic gender construct for each new historical period. In ours, diversity seems the only appropriate strategy to counteract woman's attack against the

monolithic patriarchal man. Hegemonic masculinity, Robert Hanke writes, “works through a variety of representational strategies, including images of feminised masculinity and the construction of negative symbols of masculinity, in order to win the consent of male and female viewers, who, as social agents, may be situated very differently.”<sup>7</sup> Hanke’s conclusion is that patriarchy perpetuates itself in this way, making itself stronger against the “counter-hegemonic forces, such as liberal-feminist ideology and gay/lesbian politics.”<sup>8</sup> For him, the beautiful face of Keanu Reeves and the horrific face of Robert Englund as Freddy Krueger in *Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984) would be part of a continuum.

There is no identifiable dialectical relationship between two idealised models of masculinity, as in Solomon-Godeau’s scheme, but a much more complex situation. Man is trying out many new faces in an attempt to redirect the cyclical regeneration of masculinity simultaneously in two directions. On the one hand, man is responding to certain pressures which are no doubt a consequence of feminism and gay liberation. This seems to be but a secondary aspect of an intense dialogue that white heterosexual man is having with himself, dealing with how to disentangle the now no longer respectable patriarchy from the need to recover the lost respectability of masculinity. In this dialogue victimisation plays an essential role: man often represents himself as a monster, as a man behind the mask, to signify the rejection of the old patriarchal masculinity and the very difficult birth of an ideal new man. This New Man, however, would respond to heterosexual man’s needs rather than to women’s.

Women are now inclined towards men who resemble them. They appreciate tenderness, sensitivity and a capacity for commitment and, seemingly, scan the feminised male faces of the younger screen idols for a similar attitude towards life. A scientific study run simultaneously in Scotland and Japan reached this conclusion. The subjects, groups of male and female college students, were shown computer-modified faces of men and women. Both groups showed a preference for feminised female *and* male faces, rejecting masculinised male faces. The researchers describe twin trends: a preference for fewer differences between males and females, accompanied by a preference for feminised male faces perceived as younger faces, though the issue of youth deserves little comment.<sup>9</sup> Women choose feminised men for cultural and biological reasons, as feminised males are intuitively sensed to be potentially better fathers.

It might be perhaps unwise to jump to the conclusion that a top sex symbol like Brad Pitt is admired because his good looks suggest to his admirers that he would be the caring father of lovely babies. Yet ideal fatherhood seems to be indeed one of the most important issues at stake in the choice of favourite male faces. Advertising campaigns are today full of Brad-Pitt-lookalikes with babies in their arms. Not even the tough guy is exempt from this pressure. More and more films deal with the issue of ideal fatherhood, including, for instance, *Junior*, where Schwarzenegger plays a sensitive pregnant father. Science might have the right answer after all. Still, by offering images of feminised masculinity Hollywood is cashing on a trend that does not really empower women but the younger or older men that respond to this new ideal of the caring father and companion.



What Hanke calls the negative symbols of masculinity are, as far as cinema is concerned, a growing number of monstrous male characters that range from the neo-Gothic villain to the neo-Romantic doomed hero. Classic monster films rely on a triangle formed by the hero, the woman he rescues from the clutches of the monster and the creature. Linda Williams has described very effectively how under this model man identifies women and the monster with his Other –the heroine is used to confirm man’s heterosexual masculinity; the monster is used to confirm man’s masculine normality and normativity.<sup>10</sup> Woman and monster still fulfil that function in many films with monster, not only horror films but also thrillers and action films. Yet, from the mid 1970s – possibly even earlier, from Hitchcock’s *Psycho* (1960) onwards– man appears to be the monster himself, either as victimiser (that is to say, abuser) or as victimised (that is to say, abused).

However, while the monstrous feminine has received the full attention of among others, Barbara Creed,<sup>11</sup> the monstrous masculine has received only partial attention. Carol Clover and Vera Dika<sup>12</sup> have analysed the horror film from the perspective of how patriarchy uses the victimisation of women in them to halt the advances of the independent woman by instilling fear of the male monster in her. The connection between masculinity and patriarchy, nonetheless, has been taken for granted, nor has enough attention been paid to how films reflect what troubles men in relation to *themselves* rather than to how they define themselves and masculinity against the image of women and/or homosexual men.

Susan Jeffords observes in *Hard Bodies* that most of the horrific transformations of the body in recent Hollywood films, from *Robocop* (1987) to *The Fly* (1986), passing through *Edward Scissorhands* (1990) and *Beauty and the Beast* (1991) happen to men. She notes that they affect mainly “heterosexual white men, the men whose profit from traditional masculinities seems most threatened by the changing economic and social marketplace that typifies this period”.<sup>13</sup> Looking at Disney’s *Beauty and the Beast* in detail she criticises how this tale was chosen for a new version because it “helps to forward the image of unloved and unhappy white men who needed kindness and affection, rather than criticism and reform, in order to become their ‘true’ selves again.”<sup>14</sup> Man<sup>15</sup> represents himself as a monster, victim or victimiser is practically the same, basically to send woman a clear message: accept and love me or I will not change.

David Savran concurs with her view but he focuses rather on man alone. In his book *Taking It like a Man*, he traces the rise of the figure of the victimised white man back to the 1950s Beats. Savran uses Freud’s concept of reflexive sadomasochism to explain how modern man splits especially in the 1970s between a masculinised self that punishes and a feminised self that demands punishment: “No longer having others on whom to inflict his power and his pain with impunity, the male subject began to turn against himself and to prove his mettle by gritting his teeth and taking his punishment like a man.”<sup>16</sup> In many of the films with monstrous heroes or villains, men are seen to ‘take it like a man’; ‘it’ usually meaning rejection or physical punishment within a process constantly redefining the meaning of masculinity.

This split of man between a sadistic and a masochistic self, which should cease being identified with ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’ positions so as to avoid an unacceptable essentialism, is the origin of the negative symbols of masculinity. They

signify not only that the white heterosexual man is angry and confused by the rejection of his authority by others, but also that he is trying to revive this authority by looking inside his worst aspects; this is part of the process to regenerate his lost respectability. The monstrous faces are those of the patriarchal man who will never accept his loss of privileges, but also those of the man trapped in the maelstrom created by the conjunction of forces against those privileges. He has given them up because he knows they cannot – should not– be sustained as they were, but he has not given up his hopes for a future in which his son, man’s New Man, will be respected again. In this context, the mask of horror surfaces precisely to denounce that masculinity has been so far under patriarchy nothing but a masquerade. It may have hurt others, too, but the masquerade has also hurt men by forcing them to perform false monstrous selves. At least, so they claim in countless films from *Star Wars* (1977) to *Spawn* (1998) in which, inevitably, under the mask of the monstrous villain lies a man in pain.

Some recent books dealing with male make-up artists working in film focus on the triangle formed by men, make-up and monstrosity<sup>17</sup> rather than on correcting make-up, which is hardly mentioned. The attention paid to fantasy make-up by men and for men is in itself remarkable, for make-up artists like Max Factor have decisively contributed rather to how women use cosmetics today in their everyday lives. Still, while women use facial make-up both on and off the screen, men restrict the use of make-up for performance, from film to drag queen cabaret. Jackie Stacey describes in *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* the different identificatory practices that link the female star on the screen and the woman spectator. The correspondents she worked with claimed that the pleasure of looking at the specific features of a female star’s face resulted in “a form of personalisation of the Hollywood star otherwise kept at a distance on the screen.”<sup>18</sup> The close-up made identification possible and with it, identificatory practices including the purchase and use of make-up not so much to copy the image of the star as to find one’s own.

Stacey observes, very briefly, that men must also go through similar processes of idealisation and identification leading to changes in their physical and mental outlook. These remain unknown so far. She notices, though, that “masculine ideals are more diverse, less based upon image and physical appearance than on status, power and activity, and offer the possibility of improving with age in some cases.”<sup>19</sup> The identificatory practices of men, however, do not include imitating the correcting make-up used by screen male actors. Yet, it is not unusual for men to imitate the masks of horror of cinema in the context of carnivalesque celebrations from Halloween to private parties. On the other hand, although men reject make-up as used by women, they associate daily care cosmetics and plastic surgery for men with status. Bret Easton Ellis uses this ironically in his novel *American Psycho* whose film version is shortly to be released. Pat Bateman, the hero, is a 1980s Manhattan yuppie fond of quoting the lists of very expensive cosmetics he uses; he is in addition, a brutal psychopath: a monster masquerading behind a handsome face.

Men of middle or upper class background use their enhanced attractive to enhance their public image. This is usually focused on the face since men tend to wear discreet clothes that blur their bodies. Hollywood male stars may even go further than cosmetics and surgery allow. Infographics –the modification of film images through computers– is rumoured to be the key to the improved physical appearances of a number



of top male actors. Nigel Andrews claims that “pixel-manipulation is now an open secret”<sup>20</sup> and indicates that Arnold Schwarzenegger, who reached stardom thanks to the monstrous Terminator of the eponymous film (1984), was the first trend-setter in this field. As his muscles dwindle, Schwarzenegger’s face receives more and more attention, hence his need to invest time and resources on it. Even tough guys like him, who would have epitomised in the past the rejection of all forms of facial improvement as unmanly artifice, choose now to take good care of their faces on and off the film screen. It is important to note, though, that in Schwarzenegger’s case he has chosen to soften his harsh facial features. Rejecting his previous barbarian warrior look, Schwarzenegger has embraced from the early 1990s onwards a more fatherly role which called for a mellowing, less authoritarian mask-like face.

If learning how men actually identify with the male stars on the screen through their faces is difficult enough, learning how they react to the masks of horrific masculinity of an Hannibal Lecter or a Terminator seems even harder to assess. The fact is that films with elements derived from Gothic –from horror to the action film passing through fantasy - grant man a carnivalesque space to play with make-up as he cannot do in everyday life. And this is a space that has been steadily growing in film since the late 1970s, when the monster reached Hollywood’s mainstream. Antony Timpone’s survey of the world of today’s make-up and special effects artists<sup>21</sup> begins by noting that while playing a monster would have been restricted to supporting actors a few decades ago, today many first-rate male actors have appeared on the screen as monsters in make-up. Among others, Tom Cruise in *Interview with the Vampire* (1994), Liam Neeson in *Darkman* (1990), Gary Oldman in *Bram Stoker’s Dracula* (1992), Robert De Niro in *Mary Shelley’s Frankenstein* (1994), Al Pacino in *Dick Tracy* (1990), Jack Nicholson in *Wolf* (1994) have played roles as monsters. If roles of this type are coveted by such admired actors, this means the roles must have come to signify something of import for man in recent years. These actors may be simply taking up an attractive professional challenge, but the audience’s positive response shows that what is at stake is rather more than this. What is at stake is the new perception –the fear– that even the most respectable men may conceal a monster inside.

For Jean Baudrillard, the female stars of the studio age were not real women but “transsexual, suprasensual beings, around whom crystallised stern rituals and a wasteful profusion which turned them into a generation of sacred monsters”.<sup>22</sup> Doug Bradley uses the same phrase, ‘sacred monsters,’ as the title of a fascinating book, published in 1996,<sup>23</sup> dealing with male actors and the horror film. Bradley writes with the authority conferred to him by his having played the role of the infernal Cenobite Pinhead in the *Hellraiser* films (1987-). In his book he delineates an alternative history of cinema in which the art of make-up and the mask of the male actor characterised as a monster becomes the centre of attention. Bradley’s central thesis is that the faces of the icons of horror are today as popular as the faces of the icons of beauty and so they deserve the same critical attention. Pinhead himself, Freddy Krueger of *Nightmare on Elm Street*, and the masked faces of Jason in the *Friday the 13<sup>th</sup>* series (1980-), Michael Myers of *Halloween* (1978-), and the killer in *Scream* (1996), among many others, form part of a history from which woman is practically excluded except as victim of the monster. The masked male monsters that Bradley examines are the dark counterpart of Baudrillard’s female stars: frequently male but oddly asexual, disabled for the pleasures of sensuality

except for violence, as often villains as heroes, they are trapped in a limbo where the contradictions of modern masculinity are dramatised.

According to Doug Bradley, today's Gothic icons are the heirs of the shaman, a proto-theatrical performer involved in the ritual and ceremony that lies at the origin of Greek drama (in Greek the same word meant face and mask). The Church's intolerance caused the disappearance of Latin drama and of theatres all over Europe and, with it, of the mask. The mask survived, though, in carnival, returning to the stage in the Italian *comedia dell'arte* but also in Jacobean tragedy. From this it must have reached Gothic fiction and drama. The mask jumped from 19<sup>th</sup> century British Gothic onto the Hollywood cinema screen, diversifying its presence through horror, sci-fi, action, fantasy and even comedy (Jim Carrey in *The Mask* 1994) or adventure (Antonio Banderas in *Mask of Zorro*, 1998).

Lon Chaney, the man of the thousand faces, defined the trends for fantasy make-up in the first decades of film with his characterisations as Erik, the Phantom of the Opera (1925), from the novel by Gaston Leroux, and Quasimodo, the Hunchback of Notre Dame (1922), from the novel by Victor Hugo. Chaney actually reversed a trend in film, a medium which had originally rejected the mask. The naturalism of film and the new sense of intimacy with the actor achieved through the close-up in film resulted, according to Bela Balázs,<sup>24</sup> in the decadence of the romantic style of acting associated to the British theatre. The romantic faces of theatre idols went also out of fashion, especially as regards male actors, since exceptional, romantic, heavily made-up faces started being perceived as artificial masks in comparison to the more ordinary faces of naturalistic cinema. Balázs suggests that the fragmentation of the face on the screen through the close-up enabled ordinary faces to triumph, as audiences could find attractive individual features in “ugly faces no less than in handsome ones.”<sup>25</sup>

Chaney was an ordinary-looking man who found in the horrific mask a new means of expression. His own face was drowned in the sea of new faces he created often at the cost of acute physical suffering. He succeeded by forcing film audiences already familiar with the intimacy of the close-up to look at the monster. A scene with Chaney remains in the collective imaginary as one of the scariest ever filmed: Christine's playful unmasking of her benefactor in *The Phantom of the Opera* reveals a cadaverous face that the horrified audience sees seconds before she does. As David Skal notes, Chaney's monstrous faces also “bore more than a passing resemblance to the faces of the *mutilés de guerre* that haunted Europe and America”<sup>26</sup> after WWI. Chaney seems to have capitalised on a new sensibility towards Gothic –for his creations never reflect contemporary reality– awakened by WWI's *mutilés de guerre*. In the same way that Chaney may have metaphorically reflected the ravages that the war inflicted on men's faces and masculinity, the 1930s horror film cycle, which has legated wonderful masks such as Jack Pierce's make-up for Boris Karloff in *Frankenstein* (1931), would reflect the anxieties of Depression.

Between the 1930s and the 1970s, the names of Karloff himself, Bela Lugosi, Charles Laughton, Lon Chaney Jr., Vincent Price, Christopher Lee were added to the roll call of monstrous fame –not to mention the many masked superheroes of comic that emerged then, especially Batman (1940). The Hollywood cycle of adaptations of classics of British Gothic of the 1930s –*Frankenstein*, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*, *The*

*Island of Dr. Moreau*— had little continuance in the 1940s, but re-emerged with the work of the British Hammer studios in the 1950s while Hollywood busied itself with countless monster films about extraterrestrial invasions. The 1960s would bring Roger Corman's adaptations of Poe's tales and a renewed interest in the faces of the male monster, from Norman Bates in Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) to the half-glimpsed Devil of Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby* (1968). Anthony Perkins contributed the face of the ordinary man to this gallery of male monsters, but two names deserve also special attention here because of their exceptionality: Fredric March as Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde (1932), and the French actor Jean Marais as the Beast in Jean Cocteau's *Beauty and the Beast* (1946). March and Marais were both distinctly handsome men who were presented on the screen as terrifying monsters, the monster signifying the dark side of their personality. Following the steps of Wilde's *Dorian Gray* and anticipating Ellis's Pat Bateman, March's performance suggested that the link between male beauty and monstrosity is close. So did Marais, though in his case he gave the monster the dignity of the unfairly victimised, an aspect that would resurface in the 1990s, and not only in Disney's version of the same tale.

The male face that truly altered the story of man as monster on the screen, beginning a new cycle, was that of Leatherface, the psychopath who dons a mask made of his victims' skin in *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* (1974). He would be later imitated by the frustrated transsexual killer of *Silence of the Lambs* (1991), whose new face and body are made of pieces of women's skin. Actually, the story of film make-up radically changed in the late 1970s with the development of latex foam, a pliant substance that allowed make-up artists to realise their wildest dreams on the actors' faces. "The resulting public spectacle of infinitely plastic human bodies," David Skal writes, "paralleled and reflected the quantum growth of cosmetic surgery as a cultural activity and obsession during the same period".<sup>27</sup> As Philip Brophy<sup>28</sup> has noted, the contemporary horror film is obsessed with flesh, though the face plays in horror film a much more relevant role than his thesis might imply. The point, though, is that, possibly since David Lynch's *The Elephant Man* (1980), the face of horror has come to signify *both* the face of man as threatening monster and of man as victimised monster. And by no means exclusively in horror cinema.

Masked men have appeared as fallen, Miltonic monsters (Pinhead in the *Hellraiser* films; Darth Vader in the *Star Wars* saga), evil psychopaths far from normative masculinity often traumatised by Freudian events in their childhood (Jason in *Friday the 13th*, Michael Myers in *Halloween*), challenging, mischievous icons of evil (Freddy Krueger, Hannibal Lecter in *Silence of the Lambs*), Romantic victims (*The Crow*, *Interview with the Vampire*), manufactured innocents unfairly abused (*Edward Scissorhands*, *Robocop*), victims of scientific accidents (*Darkman*), strange prodigies of nature (*The Elephant Man*, the teenager in *Mask*) and even superheroes (the *Batman* films (1989-)). Different attitudes towards the monstrous mask mark the irredeemable (patriarchal) man apart from and the redeemable (New) man in search of love and understanding. The former assumes the mask with pride, as a sign of empowerment, and uses evil as subversive resistance against the rule of the law or of political correctness, as few men can do in real life. The latter suffers from the mask's unfairly concealing his true inner self. Together, all these male monsters aim at convincing men themselves, not so much women, that the monstrous patriarch is easy to spot —not so easy to kill, as the villain often returns from death— and that for the New Man to emerge the sins of



patriarchal men must be forgiven and forgotten. What is usually at stake is the birth of a new man that can establish a satisfactory bond with the generation of the father, if not with the father himself.

Randall Wallace's recent *Man in the Iron Mask* (1997) is a clear example of the different meanings of the mask within this plot of encounter with the proper father (or father figure). The quintessential new man, Leonardo Di Caprio, plays the roles of the despotic King Louis XIV and of his secret twin; the latter is the legitimate heir to France's throne having been born minutes before the usurper. The King is a handsome seducer, fond of hurting those he manipulates and of showing forth his glory by using a sun mask –he was, of course, known as the King Sun, the Sun being a symbol for masculinity in contrast with the feminine Moon. The plot concerns the liberation of the King's secret twin from his terrible imprisonment; his face is concealed by an imposing iron mask meant to contrast with the King's splendid sun mask. The Queen, unable to free her own good son from the influence of the evil one, requests from the retired Four Musketeers that they help her and so they do, as male bonding between them is restored and D'Artagnan discovers that he is the real father of the twins. As a proper new father, D'Artagnan rejects the King and restores secretly the throne to the actual heir, the newly unmasked, soft man. The illegitimacy of the birth is thus split into two; by honouring the elder twin d'Artagnan clears the Queen from the guilt of having produced the horrific Louis XIV, and vindicates himself as the until then secret good father of a secret good son. Notice that it is the Queen's anxiety for her lost son that unchains the plot, but that, ultimately, she gains no greater share of power for doing so.

The twins of Wallace's film show how man is either born an irredeemable monster (a villain hiding behind a mask of respectability) or silenced by a monstrous mask that oppresses him. The villain refuses to accept his guilt in abusing others; but there are no guarantees that the abused man will set a new pattern from which abuse will be wholly absent. Often, the victimised man uses a new identity to wreak havoc among the villains, as happens in *Robocop*, *The Crow*, *Darkman*, *Spawn*. In the process he comes to hate himself; thus, when girlfriend Julie gathers courage to look at Darkman's disfigured face (close enough to Chaney's Phantom) he tells her she may accept the physical monster, but he's not willing to let her accept the moral monster he has become. He may even choose to destruct himself, having come to the conclusion that his survival threatens those close to him: the monstrous hero of Cronenberg's *The Fly* asks to be killed just before attempting to claim the life of his unborn male child. Or he may simply renounce leading a conventional family life, isolating himself; this is the option chosen by Edward in Tim Burton's *Edward Scissorhands* and by the Robocop of the eponymous films.

The irredeemable monsters play their role with glee, looking down on ordinary mankind. Yet, the films in which they appear often emphasize that they are the result of some form of victimisation. Hitchcock borrowed Freudian, Oedipal parameters to justify Norman Bates's abnormality; many others have imitated him, though, quite wisely, screen writers have not used that easy resource to create today's most potent icon of evil: Hannibal Lecter. The obsession for explaining that monstrous men are originally innocent is currently at work in George Lucas's new *Star Wars* trilogy –we are still to see how the courageous child Annakin Skywalker of *The Phantom Menace* (1999) becomes eventually the quintessential male masked monster, Darth Vader. *Interview*

*with the Vampire* presents masculinity as an endless chain of victimisation: handsome, bereaved Louis (Brad Pitt) is ‘made’ a vampire (a man?) by the seductive vampire Lestat (Tom Cruise), himself made a vampire by another man in a patrilineal line of descent that goes back centuries in time. The Cenobite Pinhead is guilty of having wanted to taste the extreme pleasures of Hell, for which he (originally a World War I officer) becomes a demon in charge of recruiting other men for the same grisly pleasures. There is never a monstrous father acknowledging that he is the ultimate abuser from which all the others descend. Monstrous men form a monstrous chain which has no end. Even the best recent films about Nazism, Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List* (1993) and Costa-Gavras’s *The Music Box* (1989) shy away from facing Hitler, preferring instead to focus on the (handsome) faces of monstrous men under his command.

The mask as used in carnival is simultaneously an excuse for indulging in usually illicit behaviour and a protection from the public disclosure of the masked individual’s identity. Comparatively speaking, few are the films that look into the twin aspects of carnivalesque liberation and concealment among a proliferation of films in which the mask *is* the identity of the monster. Only for Stanley Ipkiss, the comic hero of *The Mask*, is the monstrous mask a true token of liberation. An ancient mask associated to the cult of a lesser god of mischief turns Everyman Ipkiss into mischief itself. Ipkiss thinks that the absolute freedom and unconventionality of his behaviour as the unstoppable masked cartoon he becomes, will seduce the beautiful woman he wants, a gangster’s moll. But she prefers plain Stanley, teaching him just to enjoy being himself and freeing him from his dependence on the mask. John Woo’s certainly carnivalesque *Face Off* (1996) has an FBI agent (John Travolta) and a criminal (Nicholas Cage) literally swap faces, and with them their roles as privileged persecutor and villainous persecuted. Unlike what should be expected, it is the villain who experiences episodes of liberation into the envied suburban life of his enemy. Contradicting the central investment of these films into the economy of the face as a fixed sign of identity, Andrew Nichol’s innovative *Gattaca* (1998) portrays a future eugenic society in which individuals are identified by their DNA while their faces remain anonymous. His protagonist, a young man born with a defective heart, can fool the system and reach the goal of travelling to outer space despite his physical flaws, because no one can see that his face does not correspond to that of the man he pretends to be.

The issue of genetics which *Gattaca* rises is the secret heart of three films in which man appears as an innocent freak. The disfigured, defaced man aspires to vindicating his humanity in a cruel world. In these three cases, the relationship between the monstrous man and his mother is crucial even when it is not developed in depth. In contrast, nothing is said at all about the fathers who don’t even seem to play a significant genetic role in the making of their son’s monstrous faces. In *The Elephant Man* (1980) the spectator is challenged to see the humanity of the freak John Merrick beneath his deformed face and body. John Hurt, anonymous behind Merrick’s face, played the Elephant Man as a deprived child, a human being that was not accepted as such. The film’s discourse apparently centres on the obstacles Merrick must overcome to be treated as a person and not as an animal, as can be seen in the harrowing scene in which a wild crowd terrorises him in the underground. The film’s implicit discourse, though, attacks the beautiful mother who abandoned the child Merrick, feeling unable to cope with his deformities. These are attributed to her having been scared by a circus

elephant; nothing is said about Merrick's actual father. The fatherly Dr. Trevves plays the role of both parents for Merrick. Another doctor—a plastic surgeon—undoes the spell that the drugs taken by his irresponsible mother (a prostitute) cast on the freak Johnny (Mickey Rourke) in *Johnny Handsome* (1989). After her death, Johnny, who ignores who his father is, grows to be a petty criminal exploited by a vicious couple. Later, he is turned into a handsome man by this surgeon, who believes that the looks make the man. Johnny's inner self is tainted, though, and despite his girlfriend's love, he seeks revenge, leading himself and his former partners to death. Quite different is the mother of teenager Rocky Dennis played by Cher in *Mask*. The mother who stands by his severely deformed male child, who loves him despite his 'mask,' is vindicated here, but normality is never really achieved, as Rocky dies still young, just after having met his first love. Again, the father's absence merits no comment.

Fatherhood is also the main issue in two other films about male freaks, made rather than born in this case. Their hybrid faces, which are only partly disfigured, are the face of the missing ideal father according to Hollywood. One belongs to Mel Gibson as Justin in *Man without a Face* (1993), his first film as director. The other belongs to Arnold Schwarzenegger as the Terminator of the 1991 sequel, *Judgement Day*. Gibson turned Isabelle Holland's novel about the awakening to homosexuality of a teenage boy into the story of the impossible relationship between Chuck, the son of a man who committed suicide—the man without a face of the title—and Justin, a teacher unfairly accused of sexually abusing a male student. One side of the face of Gibson's Justin was burnt in the car crash in which the student died. The face here is a stigma that man bears, a mark of innocence soiled by unfounded accusations. Gibson's film is clear in its conservative message: young men must find a father figure to grow up into adult men, another man must play this role if the father is missing. But men fail to be proper fathers now because the 'others' (women, society) have—literally and figuratively—defaced them, accusing them of crimes they have not committed. Suspected of abusing Chuck, his new pupil, Justin breaks the relationship; following Chuck's life from afar he seems to wait for a future when they can be reunited as free adult men. The film is, significantly, narrated by an adult Chuck who looks back towards his childhood from an ambiguous present of which we know nothing. Presumably, he's grown into a balanced, mature man, thanks to Justin's victimisation and, above all, to his teachings, but this can only be the spectator's guess.

Schwarzenegger's Terminator is an even more emblematic figure. The old Terminator was sent back from the future to 1984 with the mission of killing Sarah Connor so as to prevent the birth of her son. The machines at war with humankind—man's monstrous heirs—had manufactured and programmed him; he was meant to kill John Connor, the leader of the human faction that would defeat them, while still in his mother's womb. In the sequel, he has been reprogrammed by man's New Man (John as his future self) to protect his 10-year-old self from the threat of the new shapeshifting T-1000, sent by the machines back to 1991. John has also transformed the old Terminator into a caring father since, as Sarah claims, no man would accept her appeal to replace John's dead father, another man from the future killed by the old Terminator in 1984. Once the Terminator's mission to protect John is accomplished, he must destroy himself, despite the protests of the boy, to prevent others from endangering the future of mankind by abusing the technology that made him. One of the most horrific scenes of the first film (1984) shows Schwarzenegger nonchalantly stripping a piece of decaying

skin off his face, showing that the skin barely covers a metal skull. In the scene of his farewell in the 1991 sequel, Schwarzenegger's face recalls the skinned face of the first film: in 1984 that face signified the monstrosity of men's machines; in 1991, it signified the flaws of the ideal father, embodied here by a reformed killing machine.

The ideal, fully human father still has no face, for, like John, he still has to become a man. The Terminator must be destroyed because he is the old father of patriarchy: a destructive machine that is still a machine despite having being reprogrammed to protect his 'family'. He may protect his 'son' but is, clearly, no companion for his mother. Yet the muscled Terminator of marked facial features fills in momentarily a gap left by two enigmatic new men. One, the new Terminator, has no face that really belongs to him: he is a shapeshifter that assumes different personalities for his own ends –perhaps a neat metaphor for man's resistance to the loss of his privileges. The other, John's biological father is, paradoxically, born years after fathering his son; John selects him among his freedom fighters apparently to locate and protect Sarah from the old Terminator, but actually to be his own father. Man's New Man, in short, is in the process of fathering himself. He needs a strong, courageous mother like Sarah Connor, but she's not his main worry. His anxiety is raised by the difficulties of finding a proper model: the old Terminator is patriarchy terminated, the new one is modern man as dangerous shapeshifter, the biological father is nothing but a (dead) body whose function is exhausted in procreation.

Younger icons –Leonardo di Caprio, Brad Pitt–may be lending their faces to the figure of the ideal father that should emerge in the near future to replace the old-fashioned, patriarchal, terminated father who has been now finally unmasked. Meanwhile, the many monstrous faces of man in recent Hollywood films reflect a so far rather blind search for a new hegemonic masculinity. As David Savran suggests, men are telling themselves they must be punished for their excesses and, so, frequently present themselves split between an irredeemable masked man, for whom the mask is an expression of empowerment, and a redeemable masked man, for whom the mask is an expression of oppression. The masks of horrific monsters or villains and those of horrified freaks signify an oscillation between rage and powerlessness in man's outlook on the loss of privileges of (mainly white) heterosexual masculinity. Clearly, man is using negative symbols, in Robert Hanke's phrase, to convince himself and others that he is looking deep into himself to find where his guilt lies in the construction of patriarchy. But at the same time, he feels that masculinity has unfairly come under attack and is trying to recapture some of his lost prestige if not for the man of the present at least for the man of the future. Man's New Man may not be monstrous at all, but, so far, there is not a single male face acknowledged as the face of ideal man according to the collective and personal fantasies that shape Hollywood. In the meantime, a multiplicity of male faces, among which the masks abound, make up for this lack.



## NOTES AND REFERENCES

- <sup>1</sup> See: Steven Cohan, *Masked Men: Masculinity and the Movies in the Fifties* (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1997); Yvonne Tasker, *Spectacular Bodies* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993) and Susan Jeffords, *Hard Bodies: Hollywood Masculinity in the Reagan Era* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1994).
- <sup>2</sup> Roland Barthes, 'The Face of Garbo' in *Mythologies*, selected and translated by Annette Lavers (London: Vintage, 1993), pp. 56-57.
- <sup>3</sup> Jean Baudrillard, *Seduction*, trans. Brian Singer (Houndsmill and London: Macmillan, 1990), p. 33.
- <sup>4</sup> Abigail Solomon-Godeau, *Male Trouble: A Crisis in Representation* (London: Thames & Hudson, Ltd., 1997), p. 26.
- <sup>5</sup> Stan Denski and David Sholle, 'Metal Men and Glamour Boys: Gender Performance in Heavy Metal' in Steven Craig (ed), *Men and the Media* (Newbury Park, London and Delhi: SAGE Publications, 1992), pp. 41-60, p. 52.
- <sup>6</sup> Cohan, *Masked Men*, p. 35.
- <sup>7</sup> Robert Hanke, 'Redesigning Men: Hegemonic Masculinity in Transition,' in Steven Craig (ed.), *Men and the Media* (Newbury Park, London and Delhi: SAGE Publications, 1992), pp. 185-198, p. 196.
- <sup>8</sup> Hanke, 'Redesigning Men', p. 197.
- <sup>9</sup> D.I. Perret et al., 'Effects of Sexual Dimorphism on Facial Attractiveness,' *Nature*, Vol. 394, no. 6696 (27 August 1998), pp. 884-7. See also Magnus Enquist and Stefano Ghirlanda, 'Evolutionary Biology: The Secrets of Faces,' *Nature*, Vol. 394, no. 6696 (27 August 1998), pp. 826-7.
- <sup>10</sup> Linda Williams, 'When the Woman Looks' in Mary Ann Doane, Patricia Mellencamp and Linda Williams (eds), *Re-Vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism* (Los Angeles: The American Film Institute / University Publications of America, Inc., 1984), pp. 83 - 99.
- <sup>11</sup> Barbara Creed, *The Monstrous-Feminine: Film, Feminism, Psychoanalysis* (London and New York: Routledge, 1993).
- <sup>12</sup> Carol Clover, *Men, Women and Chainsaws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (London: BFI Publishing, 1992); Vera Dika, *Games of Terror: Halloween, Friday the 13th and the Films of the Stalker Cycle* (London and Toronto: Associated University Press, 1990).
- <sup>13</sup> Jeffords, *Hard Bodies*, p. 147.
- <sup>14</sup> Jeffords, *Hard Bodies*, p. 148.
- <sup>15</sup> There is not enough room here to consider the role played by women in representing men as monsters. Yet, *Beauty and the Beast* is a fairy-tale popularised by a woman, Madame Le Prince de Beaumont; Disney's version was scripted by another, Linda Wolverton.
- <sup>16</sup> David Savran, *Taking it like a Man: White Masculinity, Masochism, and Contemporary American Culture* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1998).
- <sup>17</sup> See Anthony Timpone, *Men, Make-up and Monsters* (New York, St. Martin's Griffin Press, 1996) and Mark Salisbury and Alan Hedgcock, *Behind the Mask: The Secret of Hollywood's Monster Makers* (London, Titan Books, 1994).
- <sup>18</sup> Jackie Stacey, *Star Gazing: Hollywood Cinema and Female Spectatorship* (London and New York: Routledge, 1994) p. 206.
- <sup>19</sup> Stacey, *Star Gazing*, p. 67.
- <sup>20</sup> Nigel Andrews, *True Myths: The Life and Times of Arnold Schwarzenegger* (London, Bloomsbury, 1995), p. 204.
- <sup>21</sup> Dick Smith, Rick Baker, Stan Winston, Tom Savinni, John Caglione jr., Steve Johnson, Chris Walas, Kevin Yagher, Bob Keen and Image Animation, Tony Gardner and Alterian Studios, the KNB EFX Group, Optic Nerve Studios.
- <sup>22</sup> Baudrillard, *Seduction*, p. 94.
- <sup>23</sup> Doug Bradley, *Sacred Monsters* (London: Titan Books, 1996).





<sup>24</sup> Bela Balázs, 'The Face of Man,' *Theory of the Film* (New York: Arno Press & The New York Times and London: Dennis Dobson Ltd.: 1972), pp. 60-89.

<sup>25</sup> Balázs, 'The Face of Man,' p. 78.

<sup>26</sup> David Skal, *The Monster Show* (London: Plexus, 1993), p. 66.

<sup>27</sup> Skal, *Monster Show*, p. 312.

<sup>28</sup> Philip Brophy, 'Horrority - the Textuality of Contemporary Horror Film,' *Screen*, Vol 27, no. 1 (January-February 1986), pp. 2 - 13.



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